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SUBJECT: SOMALIA DART SITUATION REPORT 16 - THE IMPACT
OF INSECURITY ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

REFS:A) NAIROBI 00660 B) NAIROBI 00294

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SUMMARY

¶1. Continuing insecurity and political uncertainty in Somalia are displacing some populations from Mogadishu and impeding humanitarian operations in Lower Juba Region and Mogadishu. USAID's partners continue to operate under extremely difficult circumstances, but the populations that remain inaccessible are likely to be in dire need of assistance. This cable examines the current security situation in Mogadishu and southern and central Somalia as it relates to humanitarian operations and discusses particular areas of concern. End Summary.

THE CURRENT SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

¶2. Ongoing military action against remnants of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) in southern Somalia, especially in Lower Juba Region, has had a negative impact on the ability of the humanitarian community to provide needed assistance in the most affected areas. Humanitarian assistance providers are increasingly concerned that short of immediate deployment of an effective peacekeeping force that would assist the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in establishing rule of law and security, Somalia could again be plunged into a broad civil conflict.

¶3. The security situation continues to be fluid in Somalia with violent incidents reported daily by

international relief agencies. Civil disturbances and demonstrations are also frequently reported. Additionally, threats by the TFG to forcibly evict existing internally displaced persons (IDPs) from government-owned buildings have raised concerns among the humanitarian community.

¶4. In January, the UN Common Air Service (UNCAS) and other humanitarian flights into Somalia were restricted due to insecurity. However, many key airfields throughout central and southern Somalia have now been re-opened for humanitarian air traffic by the UN. Baidoa, Galkayo, and Wajid are key airports for humanitarian operations and are currently in full operation. Other airfields, including Luuq, Jamame, and Jowhar are also open, but require special permission, and Belet Weyne airport is available for large cargo only. Mogadishu and Kismayo airports remain closed.

MOGADISHU

¶5. Continuing violence and an unpredictable security situation continue to limit movements of humanitarian personnel in Mogadishu. The UN suspended UNCAS flights to Mogadishu following the mortar attack at Mogadishu airport on January 24. The UN World Food Program (WFP) reports that the port of Mogadishu continues to operate.

¶6. On February 13, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which runs the Kesaney Hospital in Mogadishu, reported a significant increase in the number of incoming war-wounded patients. In addition to the wounded, Mogadishu hospitals continue to treat patients with malaria, diarrhea, and other diseases.

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According to the ICRC and the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the hospitals continue to function and relief agencies in Mogadishu have long-established systems to maintain operations under high levels of insecurity.

¶7. ICRC told USG Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) members that they are particularly concerned about the recent Islamist threat to shoot down any planes flying into Mogadishu airport, and that the escalating violence in Mogadishu is the worst that they have seen in 10 years.

SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL SOMALIA

¶8. Much of southern and central Somalia is experiencing a gradual improvement of security conditions. On February 12, USAID partner International Medical Corps (IMC) reported that the situation in Bay and Bakool regions, where it operates, had improved in January and humanitarian agencies were now able to access project sites that had been off-limits since December.

¶9. Little information is available on the humanitarian situation in Lower Juba Region. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Horn Relief said that surveillance flights and the presence of Ethiopian forces have created anxiety and uncertainty causing pastoral communities to change migration patterns. For example, the town of Jiir, Afmadow District, a preferred grazing area, has remained empty since the bombing there in January.

¶10. The UN has not allowed international or national staff to return to Kismayo, and the helicopter base and port there remain closed. WFP received permission to have a few staff return briefly to close the office and

inter-agency storage facility. Although the port of Kismayo remains closed and clan struggle for control over the port continues, some small vessels from Dubai have docked at the Kismayo port. WFP reports that it continues to work with some transport contractors and they are in the process of loading food that had been prepositioned in Kismayo for distribution in the region.

¶11. The ICRC is able to access Lower Juba Region and has conducted several expatriate-led medical missions to Afmadow District in the last two weeks. The ICRC can not access Kismayo by air, due to the military use of the airport. Additionally, areas southwest of Kismayo are off-limits due to ongoing military activity. On February 13, ICRC reported receiving large numbers of casualties in Kismayo hospital and is trying to transfer the most serious cases to Afmadow or Baidoa.

CLAN CONFLICT

¶12. Throughout January, UN agencies reported inter-clan fighting in Lower Juba Region that resulted in civilian deaths and small-scale displacement. Clan conflict affects the ability of humanitarian agencies to access vulnerable populations when ongoing fighting restricts local and international staff movement, delivery of resources, and program implementation.

Examples include the current clan conflicts in Lower

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Juba Region, chronic clan fighting in Gedo Region, and periodic clan fighting in Belet Weyne town, where different clans control the east and west sectors of town, which is divided by the Shabelle River.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

¶13. Most of Somalia remains at UN security phase IV, which limits UN agency operations to strictly humanitarian and emergency activities. Mogadishu and southern Lower Juba Region are classified as UN security phase V, which requires that UN activities receive approval from UN headquarters in New York, limiting UN assistance and presence.

¶14. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) also notes concerns regarding the resurgence of warlords, especially in southern Somalia, and increased checkpoints on main roads, where militias often demand road taxes and fines. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP report that banditry, roadblocks, and ambushes are increasing, making in-country transport of supplies and staff extremely difficult. UNICEF also reported that in Mogadishu pre-CIC transport protocols have returned, in which vehicles are handed off from one driver to another as they move through areas controlled by different clans.

¶15. WFP reports that by late January, the number of checkpoints on the Mogadishu-Baidoa road had diminished, but checkpoints in other areas were on the increase. WFP said a humanitarian convoy was held by militia at Haway on the Merka-Buaale road in Middle Juba Region, but was later allowed to proceed after paying a passage fee. On January 31, WFP reported that attacks on the Mogadishu-Balad road near the encampments of Ethiopian forces had increased and that convoys should take extra precautions. According to WFP, the TFG has reportedly removed most of the checkpoints on the Mogadishu-Merka-Brava road.

COMMENT

¶16. Humanitarian agencies are most concerned about

vulnerable populations in Lower Juba Region that are food insecure, flood and conflict-affected, and have nearly no access to international humanitarian services. Relief activities in Mogadishu continue, but the ongoing conflict has limited the UN's re-engagement and expansion of activities.

¶17. Insecurity and ongoing fighting in Mogadishu and Lower Juba Region have resulted in a humanitarian response in Somalia driven by access rather than need. USAID partners have been able to respond quickly and sufficiently to disease outbreaks and deliver food aid in many regions in Somalia, but the most vulnerable areas in Lower Juba Region and along the Kenya-Somalia border have not received adequate relief services.

¶18. In Lower Juba Region, only a few agencies (mostly local NGOs) have been able to travel and reliable information is unavailable. However, relief agencies believe that humanitarian indicators in this area are deteriorating due to food insecurity, lingering effects from the November-December flooding, and Rift Valley fever, which is concentrated in Afmadow District.

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¶19. To date, the DART has been unable to conduct humanitarian assessments, monitor partner programs, or begin building working relationships with Somali Transitional Federal Institutions from within Somalia due to security restrictions. The DART will continue to monitor the security situation in Somalia from Nairobi, Kenya, through partners and UN agencies with a presence on the ground, but an in-country presence is preferable. UN and NGO expatriate staff travel regularly to areas in Somalia that have been assessed by UN security officials and take the necessary precautions as mandated by UN standards.

¶20. USAID's Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance is reviewing the possibility of funding humanitarian security initiatives to ensure timely communication of accurate security information relevant to humanitarian operations, facilitate multi-agency security assessments, and improve NGO and UN agency contingency planning.

RANNEBERGER